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Case study - S-S LAG - Poland

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S-S LAG - Poland

04/12/2017

Author:

Jarosław Rżany Director S-S LAG

Loris Servillo: Expert in charge of the survey

A. Summary table

LAG name		Stowarzyszenie "Suwalsko - Sejneńska" Lokalna Grupa Działania		
Lead partner: Stowarzyszenie "Suwalsko - Sejneńska" LGD			LAG director	
Kościuszki 71, 16-400 Suwałki, Poland			Jarosław Rżany, Director s-s.lgd@o2.pl	
LAG financial structure		Main European Structural and Investment Fund	Part of another territorial delivery mechanisms	
Multi-fund		ERDF	-	
		CCI number	Financial allocation (EUR)	Priority axes concerned
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme		2014PL16M2OP010	2,250,669.50	VIII. Infrastructure for public services 9
European Social Fund (ESF) Programme		2014PL16M2OP01	1,761,579.25	IX Local Development 8, 9, 10
European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD)		2014PL06RDN001	1,113,525.00	
LAG Strategy				LAG Implementation Current situation (June 2017):
Population covered by the strategy	Specific thematic focus and challenges of the strategy	Specific territorial focus of the strategy	Specific social target of the strategy	
59,772	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Economic development o Social inclusion o Revitalization of degraded areas, cultural heritage, renewable energy sources, social infrastructure 	Mainly focused on rural development / rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Tackling social exclusion and unemployment o Marginalised communities 	Launch of call for projects

B. Strategy

B.1. Area of the CLLD

a. Area and population covered by the strategy

The area of "Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG currently covers the area of 15 communes: 15 rural communes and 1 urban commune belonging to the following districts:

- Augustów District: rural commune of Nowinka;
- Sejny District: rural communes of Puńsk, Sejny, Giby and Krasnopol and the urban commune of Sejny;
- Suwałki District: rural communes of Bakałarzewo, Filipów, Jeleniewo, Przerośl, Raczki, Suwałki, Szypliszki, Rutka-Tartak and Wiżajny.

Geographically, the area covers the Suwałki-Augustów Lakeland, part of the East Baltic Lakeland. The area covered by the Local Strategy of Development includes 300 lakes and 3 navigable rivers. Additionally, the environment favourable to tourism form the remnants of the Augustów Forests - the area belonging to the part of the country known as the Green Lungs of Poland. The regional climate is one of the coldest in Poland, apart from the mountain regions, because of harsh and long winters. Summers are very warm here, but it does not compensate for severe winters. However, thanks to this, tourists can enjoy the charms of our area also in winter - we have excellent winter sports centre in Szelment with over 200 km of cross-country skiing trails.

The area has 59,722 inhabitants (census for 2014).

The area of „Suwalsko-Sejneńska” LAG is predominantly a rural area. Arable lands account for 70% of the total area. Agricultural activities are conducted by 10 659 agricultural farms employing 73.2% of the total employed population. Only about 12% of the total working-age population find employment in various types of businesses. In 2104, the area of „Suwalsko-Sejneńska” LGD registered around 3260 economic entities. Compared to 2006, this meant an increase by 202 entities, i.e. by 6.6%. Despite a noticeable upward trend, it is worth noting that the number of functioning economic entities is insufficient and that the growth is uneven and slower than the national average as well as the average for Podlaskie voivodeship, which is 8.5%. The LGD area is an area with natural conditions very favourable to leisure and recreation for families and tourist groups as well as for the rehabilitation and integration of people with disabilities.

b. Development needs and potential of the area

The main strengths of the strategic area included in the SWOT analysis are:

- Outstanding natural and landscape values
- High environmental and health potential of the area
- Valuable architectural monuments
- High social awareness of local cultural heritage
- Precious local cultural values, ethnic mosaic, borderland character
- High theoretical potential for cultural and sporting activities among the inhabitants
- Favourable conditions for active leisure and engagement in many types of summer and winter sports

- Favourable conditions for sustainable development (especially ecological agriculture, ecotourism, food processing)
- Favourable conditions for development of renewable sources of energy
- Partnership cooperation of various social environments for local development
- Increased interest in active and nature tourism in Poland and abroad
- Strong EU and national authorities' commitment to res development
- Increased demand for "organic food" produced using organic and traditional methods
- Co-operation of municipalities, NGOs, Suwalski landscape park, Wigry national park, forest inspectorates and private entities in the field of tourism development
- Active state policy to support the development of SMEs as a basic legal form in the tourism and processing industries
- Development of new tourism and tourism support activities
- Prevention of unfavourable demographic trends

B.2. Strategy of the CLLD

a. Thematic scope of the strategy

The strategy, due to the large number of potential problems to be solved for the overall objective, aims to focus on improvement of the quality of life of the area's inhabitants including all its aspects. We wish to support all possible social, age and occupational groups, of course within available to us programs. We consider our primary objective to be the economic development of the region (including support for entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship), elimination of social exclusion areas and the best possible development of degraded areas (revitalization).

b. Objectives of the strategy and their priorities

General objective:

Improvement of the quality of life of local residents covered by the implementation of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) until 2023

Specific objective 1.

Improving the material and non-material aspects of life within the LDS area: culture, art, education, tourism, recreation and social inclusion up to 2023

Measure 1 – Investment in the future with the European Social Fund (ESF)

Measure 2 - Investment in the future under the Rural Development Program (RDP)

All of the activities under the mentioned above measures will focus on supporting the group that has been identified as disadvantaged - children and adolescents up to 25 years of age and to a lesser extent 50+ group. Regarding smaller development opportunities for these groups compared to inhabitants of metropolitan areas, this support should be directed primarily at the development of competences and skills and the development of infrastructure that will enable such developments.

Measure 3 - Elimination of barriers under ESF

Measure 4 - Elimination of barriers under RDP

Measure 5 - Elimination of barriers under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

Taking into account the large areas of social exclusion occurring in the area of LDS implementation, this measure will address the main beneficiaries of funding under our Strategy (next to development of entrepreneurship). Under the mentioned above three measures, we will focus on reducing the areas of social exclusion with particular regard to the unemployed, the poor and groups with large social dysfunctions.

Measure 6 - We remember where we came from, let's not forget where we live

Due to a low level of development of publicly accessible social infrastructure serving both the inhabitants and visitors to our region, it is considered necessary to support its development. This development should be seen both quantitatively (construction of new infrastructure) as well as qualitatively (improvement of the existing facilities, adaptation to the growing requirements of users).

Measure 7 - Strong LGD - Strength of our Region

The goal of the activities of the “Suwałsko-Sejneńska” LGD is closely linked to the development of human capital in the area under LDS. Through effective implementation of the Local Development Strategy it will be possible to subsidize areas diagnosed as requiring support. However, this will not be possible without stimulating and directing local community activities through animation and

support. Our role will also be to provide all those interested in such quantity and quality of training and advisory support so that they are able to achieve the LDS indicators.

Specific objective 2 - Improving the sphere of entrepreneurship and ecology of the LDS area by 2023

Measure 8 - Agri-food processing

Promotion of this branch of economy seems natural taking into account the large agricultural potential of this area and its high natural ecological values. Investments in this sector will not only increase the potential of agricultural production but also stimulate low-level entrepreneurship. As with this branch of production there should also be such phenomena as new local or regional products, it will also have an impact on the development of tourism, including the so much desirable all-year-round tourism.

Measure 9 - Support of the process of creation and development of SME sector entities through RDP funding

As indicated by the analysis of the state of the LDS area and social consultations, a good chance for the development of the local economy is entrepreneurship based on local resources and increasing the competitiveness of existing businesses through the implementation of innovative solutions. The results of the consultations in each of these areas have shown, in particular, that preference should be given to businesses operating in the tourism support sector and related to it trading with products of local origin.

Measure 10 - Support of the process of creation and development of new entities in SME through RDP funding

Due to the type of support (the presence of transitional support) and the specificity of those to whom the support will be given first - people excluded and threatened with exclusion, this kind of support for entrepreneurship has been separated as a separate undertaking.

Measure 11 - Ecological Suwalszczyzna (Suwałki Region)

Taking into account the unique landscape and natural values of the LDS, it is necessary to support the sustainable development of the region with regarding its natural heritage. One of the priorities we assumed reduction of the negative impact of fossil fuel combustion in households through RES investments. Another way to protect the unique qualities of the region, in addition to supporting the development of key tourism, we believe to be investment related to the proper channelling of tourism traffic. Due to the identified low environmental awareness of local communities, we will also support educational and promotional initiatives in this area.

Measure 12 - Partnership for Ecology

Our venture will include promotion of innovative solutions in the field of RES (partner projects - EAFRD). It means implementation of an innovative cooperation project for the creation of local exhibition sites and dissemination of RES solutions - renewable energy exhibition points in selected facilities of the infrastructure.

c. Targets and results

The Local Development Strategy of the "Suwalsko - Sejneńska" LAG for the years 2016-2023 proposes goals and projects which pose challenges to the whole community of the LAG - local authorities, municipalities, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, residents and external partners. Implementation of LDS requires close coordination and cooperation between the interested parties. Hence, the effectiveness of achieving the objectives set out in the document will largely depend on the unit responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy.

In the case of "Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG, such bodies will be the LAG Office acting jointly with the Audit Committee, the body controlling Association's activities. The tasks of the LAG Office will include, in particular:

- Measure effectiveness and impact of the undertaken communication activities,
- Analyse the degree of achievement of the objectives, ventures and LDS indicators,
- Examine compliance of implemented projects with the timetable specified in LDS,
- Examine compliance and amount of funds allocated from the budget for particular projects projects,
- Gather data on the quality of provided advice and activities organized in the field of community involvement,
- Collect data on activities of bodies of the Association,
- Preparing periodic (quarterly) LDS implementation reports.

At least once a year, on the basis of an analysis of reports and materials presented by the LAG office, the Audit Committee will approve the evaluation report, based on the criteria for effectiveness, sustainability, relevance and effectiveness of the analysed levels of LDS implementation.

All partners carrying out tasks defined in the LDS will be asked to actively cooperate with the LAG office. This will contribute to better organization and real-time monitoring of deployment of the document.

Basic product indicators that we plan to achieve within the framework of the Strategy:

- 50 supported enterprises
- 480 supported people at risk of social exclusion
- 1.5 ha of the area undergoing revitalization
- 32 km of modernized tourist paths
- 2 supported kitchen incubators (non-profit enterprises)
- 4 renovated historical buildings
- 15 supported facilities of social, cultural and educational infrastructure,
- 37 Renewable Energy Sources (RES) installations set up in private households

d. Maps

Local Action Group against the background of the Podlaskie voivodeship



White area - the town of Suwałki not included in the activities of the Local Action Group



B.3. Place-based approach

a. Territorial coherence

The area covered by the strategy is cohesive historically, geographically, economically and culturally. Because of the border location (the border with Lithuania, proximity of the borders with Russia and Belarus), and the peripheral character of the area, the problems it faces are cohesive for the whole of it. By the same token, similarly cohesive should be solutions that address them. The selection of such an implementation area of the Strategy resulted from two premises:

1. Entry into force of legislation about the area of a minimum population potential under the Strategy (30 000 people) which has forced the creation of groups covering larger areas with more population than those in 2007-13. The area under the activities of the present Local Action Group comprised 3 smaller groups in previous years.
2. High level of cooperation of local groups from the Suwałki region in previous years. The process of combining the potentials of the former 3 groups took place between 2014 and 2015 and proceeded smoothly - each group managed to bring into the new LAG their best qualities.

Legacy with previous experiences

The "Suwałsko - Sejneńska" Local Action Group was established on 05.08.2014 at the founding meeting in Wigry. On 15.04.2015, it was entered in the National Court Register. Due to the short history of the group, it does not possess as an entity an experience in LDS implementation. However, it is composed of three former local action groups: "Sejneńszczyzna" LAG, "Nasza Suwalszczyzna" LAG and "Szelment" LAG. The "Suwałsko - Sejneńska" LAG works also on the area of the municipality of Nowinka, formerly covered by the "Kanał Augustowski i Rospuda" LAG, though this LAG has not joined "Suwałsko - Sejneńska" LAG.

Establishment of the group in the present shape is connected with the changes in the rules governing the functioning of local action groups. This was, however, by no means, an artificial process - all the new LAGs have a long history of cooperation, both in the implementation of LDS (collaborative projects) and in activities related to training or implementation of ESF projects.

b. Synergy with existing local development strategies

The Local Development Strategy is consistent with strategic documents at all levels:

Country level:

Strategy for Socio-economic Development of Eastern Poland until 2020

Regional level:

Podlaskie Voivodeship Development Strategy 2020 (until 2020)

Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodeship for 2014-2020

Podlaskie Voivodeship Social Policy Strategy until 2020

Local level:

Development strategies for municipalities and districts covered by LDS until 2020

C. Management

C.1. Financial structure

a. Budget

Funds from the Rural Development Program

No.	Action name	Measure	Amount in PLN/EURO
1	Transfer of knowledge and innovation, and advice services	8.9	0.3m PLN /0.075m Euro
2	Processing and marketing of agricultural products, including kitchen incubators	8	0.55m PLN / 0.1375M Euro
3	Creation and operation of networks for short supply chains	8.9	0.2m PLN /0.005m Euro
4	Entrepreneurship development	9	3.5m PLN /0.005m Euro
5	Regeneration and development of countryside	2.4	1.7m PLN /0.425m Euro
6	Grant projects	2.4	0.75m PLN /0.1875m Euro
7	Cooperation projects	8.12	0.14m PLN /0.035m Euro
Total			7.14m PLN /1.785m Euro

Funds from the European Social Fund

No.	Action name	Measure	Amount in PLN
1	Non-refundable support for people intending to start a business	10	1m PLN /0.25m Euro
2	Ensuring greater availability of high quality pre-school education (3 and 4 year-old children)	1	0.8m PLN /0.2m Euro
3	Support of small (up to 100 pupils) general education schools	1	1m PLN /0.25m Euro
4	Local activity programs	3	1.8m PLN /0.45m Euro
5	Social-occupational reintegration services for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion	3	0.83m PLN /0.2075m Euro
6	Actions aimed at families, including families experiencing care and education difficulties, children and youth at risk of social exclusion	3	1.61m PLN /0.4025m Euro
Total			7.04m PLN /1.76m Euro

Funds from the European Regional Development Fund

No.	Action name	Measure	Amount in PLN
1	RES installations in households	11	1m PLN /0.25m Euro
2	Protection of biodiversity and climate:	11	1m PLN /0.25m Euro
3	Information society projects in the area of environmental education, tourism and the development of digital skills among senior citizens	5.11	0.5m PLN /0.125m Euro
4	Cultural heritage projects:	6	1.5m PLN /0.375m Euro
5	Social infrastructure projects:	5	1m PLN /0.25m Euro
6	Small scale revitalization:	6	4.0m PLN /1.0m Euro
			9.0m PLN /2.25m Euro

b. Running costs and animation

The running costs of the LAG are covered by the European Social Fund. It is the leading fund in this field for most LAGs in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Our budget for that purpose is PLN 3.05m / 0.76m Euro. Within these costs we maintain two offices of the group (in Suwałki and Sejny), covering the costs of training, organization of competitions and animations. At present we employ 5 people, all of whom have at least 4 years of experience in implementing EU projects.

C.2. Administrative structure

a. Local Action Group

"Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG is composed of people who have already been involved in LAG, members and not-members of the group. An additional 23 people from outside of the group have already been activated. They are all the most active members of their community representing social, public and business sectors. "Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG counts (as for 27.12.2015) 127 ordinary members, including 31 representatives of the public sector, 27 of business and 69 social sectors (including representatives of 19 non-governmental organizations and religious associations). The main areas of activity of representatives of the business sector are: tourism (including agritourism, hotel and tourism equipment rental), processing, consulting, and rehabilitation services. Non-governmental organizations included in the "Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG operate in such fields, as: regional promotion, local development, tourism, protection of children and youth, sports and recreation, assistance to people socially excluded and threatened by social exclusion, and social economy.

b. Networks and Cooperation

Our group belongs to the Association of Podlaskie LAG Network. This network is part of the national network. We have agreements with other LAGs and partners from abroad (Lithuania, Latvia).

D. Implementation

D.1. Strategy design

a. Strategy design

The Local Development Strategy "Suwalsko - Sejny" LAG was prepared with commitment and active participation of the local community. All social groups and sectors important for the development of the region and the quality of the LDS document were involved in the process of its formation. The consultation process will be carried out in the following stages:

1. Analysis of potential consultants - 2014

First of all, we conducted an analysis of the local community in our LAG, which would determine its composition, get to know the main actors in social and economic life and, on that basis, select the most appropriate methods of cooperation. The LAG Board has decided to set up a possibly broad LDS Working Group - 32 members (including 9 members) representing all sectors. Together with this group, consisting mainly of LAG members, it was decided to conduct the widest possible consultation and reach out to the widest possible community on how to plan for the new programming period 2014-2020. Due to the fact that this stage used Association's own resources for informing the inhabitants about the need to participate in the LDS creation process, we decided to use free channels of communication- information sent to the village leaders and placed on the websites of LAG stakeholders. All members of the "Suwalsko-Sejny" LAG group were also informed about launching of the LDS.

2. Consultation stages - 2015

Consultations of assumptions and provisions of the new LDS was planned in the following stages:

- General information and consultation meetings - 600 people attended the meetings at all stages
- Sectoral information and consultative meetings - 106 people participated in the meetings at all stages - representatives of the business sector, non-governmental organizations and local authorities
- Survey of participants in the above meetings - a survey prepared in a way that allows use in the first 3 stages of the consultation. Based on this, it was possible to both carry out and update area diagnosis documents, SWOT analysis, identify disadvantaged groups, and prioritize LDS objectives.

At all stages of LDS creation, 162 questionnaires were obtained and analysed by the Office staff. Conclusions from the analysis were used to prepare the next stages of the consultation.

The biggest impact on the final appearance of the strategy had two groups: representatives of local government and NGOs.

b. Support and guidance

Regional level authorities (Voivodeship) did not participate in the process of developing the Strategy. This is in our opinion appropriate because of the local nature of this document. Local authorities (commune and district authorities) showed a very high involvement in this process. They supported the Group by e.g. free rental of rooms for meetings with residents or sending invitations to village leaders. This allowed for a truly widespread dissemination of the assumptions of the Strategy and its truly participative character.

D.2. Strategy implementation

a. Implementation progress

At the current stage (August 2018) we are already very advanced in the implementation of the Strategy. Up to now, we have conducted and completed 19 calls for proposals - 4 under the Rural Development Program, 6 under the European Regional Development Fund and 9 under the European Social Fund. In total, we received 97 applications of which 38 were selected for funding. Almost half of them concern entrepreneurship - 12 applications for starting a new business and 5 for developing already existing ones. So far, only 3 of our applicants have signed contracts for co-financing. And precisely the length of waiting time for decisions taken at the voivodeship level is currently the biggest obstacle in implementing our Strategy.

b. Animation and participation

The goal of the activities of the "Suwalsko-Sejneńska" LAG is closely linked to the development of human capital in the area under LDS. Through effective implementation of the Local Development Strategy it will be possible to subsidize areas diagnosed as requiring support. However, this will not be possible without stimulating and directing local community activities through animation and support activities. Our role is to provide all those interested in such quantity and quality of training and advisory support so that they are able to achieve the LDS indicators.

At the moment, we try to actively participate in creating links between businesses, local NGOs and local authorities. Most of the projects that are submitted to our Group contain elements of such cooperation, which means that our actions are so far effective.

All those who are willing to engage in the local development process are provided with our support by helping them through the legal complexities, process of creation of associations, foundations or clubs. So far, we have been successful in assisting 3 associations, 1 foundation and 2 sports clubs. All organizations which we helped to create are now members of our Group.

c. Monitoring system

Monitoring throughout the implementation of the Local Development Strategy will be carried out by LAG staff in accordance with section B.2.c.

it is planned to order an evaluation of LDS implementation and operation of the LAG by an external entity twice during the implementation of LDS - in 2018 and 2023. The evaluation report will be reviewed by the Audit Commission, which will evaluate and make recommendations after analysing all performed measures and actions with a view to determining the effects of these projects, and the impact they have had on achieving LSD objectives.

E. Added values and constraints

a. *Added value and bottlenecks*

The main added value of the CLLD approach is the ability to influence almost all areas with deficits in the social sphere and in the infrastructure. In the previous perspective of 2007-13, we frequently encountered problems that we were unable to address with suitable instruments under a single-fund strategy. Some of the problems (especially those in the social sphere) were completely beyond our reach, and some of them, after exhausting our support resources, were left only half-way solved. The CLLD approach reduces these types of problem areas. Practically all social groups in our area could be targeted by our Group with some proposal of supporting.

b. *Multiple targets*

The main obstacle to implementation of multi-fund strategies are different systems of implementation of individual funds at the national level. This causes a lot of chaos both in the minds of LAG staff as well as beneficiaries who in previous years became accustomed to simple single-fund strategies. In our opinion, there should be a separate dedicated body responsible for implementation of combined-funds strategies at the national and regional level to standardize their implementations and create a coherent framework for such implementation.

c. *Adequacy*

The current funding structure of the Local Action Groups allows for a more complete stimulation of development. It would certainly be possible to improve this process by making it more flexible - we now have to implement the strategy set out in 2015 based on the data from 2013. This seems inappropriate due to the fact that socio-economic changes in our country show great dynamics.

Considering the fact that our LAG has now over three times more resources than in previous years (2007-13), the situation has improved and it is a big challenge for groups like ours to spend the funds in an effective way. Whether these funds are sufficient, we will be able to determine only after 2018, after the first evaluation of the program.

d. *Good practices*

So far we think it is too early to talk about good practices in the context of our current activities. The only thing that we already know for sure is that our group has really succeeded and can be proud about is creating the bottom-up (social) Local Development Strategy. We have not allowed any social or business sector to take the lead in its creation. All residents of our area (in our opinion) may recognize our strategy as their own and to some extent take advantage of its implementation.